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## Revolutionary political thought of Islam

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At the advent of Islam in the Arabian Peninsula, the political system that prevailed in Arabia was semi-tribal and semi-monarchical, whereas in the neighbouring areas, it was based on hereditary and despotic monarchies. In that setting common people had no civil or political rights in the affairs of the state. The Prophet Mohammed (PBUH) laid the formal foundations of the state structure in Medina just after his Hijra (migration) from Makkah to Medina and developed a participatory and consent based system of governance.

Shura (consultation) constitutes one of the cardinal principles in the Islamic perspective on socio-political organization. The opinion of the majority of Muslim jurists is that Shura is part of aza'im al-ahkam (great commandments) and is obligatory on both the ruling authority and the Muslim people.

The Quran presents Shura as a principle, and not as a system, of governance. The distinction is important to note, because the Quran thereby has left it to successive generations of Muslims to continue to strive toward a more perfect realization of the Shura principle.

The Quran (3:159) says: 'consult them in the matter. And when you have decided, then rely upon Allah'. This is a command and clearly makes Shura obligatory even for the Prophet. The Prophet (PBUH) was bestowed with extraordinary divine wisdom, knowledge, love and concern for people's welfare as no other ruler ever was or will ever be. Moreover, he enjoyed the benefit of direct revelation, a benefit that no subsequent Muslim ruler has enjoyed or will enjoy. Consequently, if Shura was obligatory for the Prophet (PBUH), there is all the more reason that it be obligatory for all subsequent Muslim rulers.

The Quran (42:38) says: 'Their affairs are run by Shura among them'. Shura is treated as an essential quality of believers. This quality is mentioned among other qualities such as

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responsiveness to Allah, performing Salah (obligatory prayers) and spending in charity, all of which are religious obligations in Islam.

Shura means a serious and effective participation in making a decision, not merely a ceremonial procedure. The Quran addresses the Prophet, who received divine revelation, to rely on Shura in making decisions concerning common matters for which no specific revelation had come. All the believers as a fortiori must follow this teaching. The distinguished Andalusian Quranic commentator Ibn Atiyya (d. 1151) stated in his commentary on this verse that ‘Shura is one of the basics of Islamic law (Sharia) and a mandatory rule; and anyone who is entrusted with a public authority and who does not take the counsel of those who have knowledge and are conscious of God, should be dismissed from his (or her) public position’.

It is important to make two observations on Shura here. The first is that the etymological form of Shura, derived from the root shawr, or advice, means mutual consultation in its widest scope, a collective deliberation in which all parties are exchanging counsel. The term Shura, as such, is to be distinguished from the term istisharah, which means one side seeking counsel from another, and from the term tashawur, which means mutual consultation, but on a lesser scale than that envisioned in Shura as a nationwide participatory political exercise.

Man is the Khalifah of Allah on Earth. Khalifa means God’s delegation of authority to the Ummah to maintain peace, justice and prosperity on earth. The concept is universal in that every individual member of the Ummah is legally obligated to ensure the proper execution of the delegated authority. Representative governance, through which this collective obligation alone can be properly fulfilled, becomes constitutionally mandatory in Islam. Absolute, cosmic sovereignty belongs to God, but He has delegated sovereignty on earth to the Ummah, the people, through the mandate of istikhlaf (by appointing mankind as His Khalifa).

The chosen Caliphs (Muslim rulers) would go to the general public to get their acceptance through the public Bay’a (oath of allegiance). Bay’a is a mutual pledge: from the ruler to follow Islamic Law and satisfy the public, and from the people to support the ruler and advise him. The Caliphs took Bay’a from the public after their nominations. Bay’a was basically a form of electing or

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confirming the Khalifa, or the chief executive. It is comprised of two steps. The first step is called bay'a khassah (special allegiance), and it is tantamount to a nomination process through private consultation. The second step is called bay'a a'mmah (public allegiance), and is the popular acceptance of the nominee. Acceptance was expressed by handshaking with the Khalifa-designate; those dissenting were free to withhold the handshake.

Constitutionally speaking, the abrogation of the bay'a is possible. It is tantamount to impeachment and dismissal from office. The first Khalifa, Abu Bakr Al Siddiq, expressly affirmed this right upon being confirmed by consensus as successor to the Prophet. He addressed the Muslims at the time of bay'a in the Mosque of the Prophet: 'I have been given authority over you, but I am not the best among you. Obey me so long as I obey God in the administration of your affairs. Where I disobey God, you owe me no obedience'. Upholding this very principle, the second Khalifa Omar bin Khattab said: 'Where I do right, assist me; where I do wrong, correct me'.

After the departure of the Prophet (PBUH) from this world, the affairs of the Ummah (Muslim community) continued to be conducted by a process of consultation involving all Muslims. It is obvious from the previously mentioned Quranic verse (3:159) that any decision made should be based on the results of Shura.

It is evident from historical events that the decisions taken were based on the opinions of the majority. Although the minority or even a single person may be right and the majority may be wrong, reliance on the majority's opinion is the only reasonable and acceptable procedure among human beings, for the risk of error in such a case is far less than in an individual or minority case.

Many precedents can be found in the life of the Prophet and the early Caliphs about decisions made according to the majority, even if they differed from the leader's view. Islam teaches that an individual must adhere to the society or community (al-jama't), which can be interpreted as the majority. The following Ahadith indicates this principle:

- a) Allah will never let my Ummah agree upon misguidance, and the hand of Allah is over the group (Jama'h), so follow the great mass of believers (Sawad ul-'Azam), and whomever dissents from them departs to hell (Al-Hakim, Hadith No.116).

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- b) Verily Allah will not make my community or Mohammed's community agree on error, and Allah's hand is with the largest congregation (Tirmidhi, Hadith No. 2256).
- c) Whoever among you wants to be in the middle of Paradise, let him cling to the Congregation (Tirmidhi).
- d) My Community shall never agree upon misguidance, therefore, if you see divergences, you must follow the greater mass or larger group (Ibn Majah, Vol No. 2, Hadith No.1303 and 3950).
- e) Whoever leaves the Community or separates himself from it by the length of a spat, dies the death of the Jahiliyya (period of ignorance prior to Islam) (Muslim).

This revolutionary political thinking based on consultation brought about a popular revolution in the world. Common, and often poor, Arabs like Abu Hurairah (RA) and Abu Musa Ashaari (RA) were catapulted into corridors of power. The Persian and the Roman Empires crumbled and were swept away by the tidal wave of this popular revolution institutionalized in the Muslim Caliphate. Hereditary dynasties were replaced by the rule of 'Slaves of Allah'. History witnessed the accountability of the Caliphs in public.

What happened after that? We treaded the path of the Romans and the Persians and adopted their traditions and customs and again set up hereditary dynasties. These were, no doubt, Muslim monarchies, but not Islamic polities. The revolutionary and democratic spirit of Islam died out very soon. The Muslim kings declared that they were the shadows of God (Zil-lullah) on earth. They declared that rulers are divinely appointed (divine rights). Most of the Muslim scholars gave unconditional support to this very un-Islamic concept in order to avoid public disorder. Unfortunately, in Muslim political history, we find most of the discussion focusing on the pivotal role of Ameer (ruler), instead of the people, that obedience to the Ameer is binding on the people, that the Shura (Parliament) can only provide advice and that their counsels and advice do not bind the Ameer.

This flawed and un-Islamic political doctrine had serious repercussions on the evolution of our religious and political life. Let us see two examples. First, about 450 ulema (religious scholars) of the time led by Abul Fadl and Faizi drew up a formal document that delegated temporal as well as

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religious powers to King Akbar, and made obedience to the King binding on the public. This gave birth to a new heretic religion, Deen-i-Ilahi. When Shaikh Ahmad Sirhandi stood up to repudiate and oppose this new religion, most of the Sufis and Ulema sided with the Mughal Emperor against the movement of the Shaikh Ahmad Sirhandi. They also supported Dara Shiko who championed the cause of the new religion against emperor Aurangzeb Aalamgir.

Secondly, once an Indian ruler, on being offended by an ordinary citizen, ordered him to be trampled under the feet by an elephant. In the evening, when the King joined the Salat al-Maghrib (the prayer just after sunset), the Imam, the prayer leader of the mosque unintentionally recited Surah Feel (Surah 105). The King felt that the Imam deliberately insulted him and the Imam met the same fate. Commenting upon this type of barbaric political behaviour, Iqbal says:

کرتی ہے ملوکیت آثار جنوں پیدا

اللہ کے نشتر ہیں تیمور ہو یا چنگیز

(The monarchy gives rise to symptoms of madness, may he Taimur or Changez, they are God's scalpels)

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